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The Man with the Wonderful Books

By the late JACOB CHAMBERLAIN, M.D., D.D.

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"Are you the man with the wonderful books, and have you any more of them?"

The question was put to me by half a dozen men on an open plain near a village in the northern part of the Native Kingdom of Hyderabad, in India. I had ridden on in advance of my party to seek for a good halting place. These men had evidently seen me as I came horseback across the plain, fending off the scorching sun with a double umbrella, and had come out from the village to meet me.

"Brothers," I had said, as we passed the polite salutations of the Telugu country—"brothers, can you point me to some shade trees near your village, under which I can pitch my tent, for the day is hot, and I am weary with a long march."

Without answering my question, scarcely seeming to notice that I had asked one, they looked up at me as I sat on my horse and eagerly asked, "Sir, are you the man with the wonderful books, and have you any more of them?"

"What books do you mean?" said I.

"Why, one of our townsmen was down at Santatópe last week Wednesday, at the Fair, and there was a foreign gentleman there with books, telling about a new Religion and talking to the people. Our townsman did not see the foreigner, and did not hear what he said, but he found some of his assistants selling the books in the market, and bought three of them, and brought them home; and there has been nothing done in this village since but read those books and talk about them. Are you the man that had them, and have you any more?"

I had been at Santatópe the preceding week, at the Fair, for I was out on a long exploring and evangelistic tour of more than 1,200 miles, up through the Native Kingdom of Hyderabad, and into Central India, in regions where, as far as I could learn, no missionary had up to that time, 1863, ever been; where the name of Jesus had never been spoken nor heard. In many of the villages mine was the first white face they had ever seen. The journey occupied between four and five months, and I had already been nearly two months on the way.

On the preceding Wednesday we had made a long march, preaching in every town and village and hamlet we came to, from sunrise until eleven o'clock, later than we usually journeyed in that heat, as we had heard of this periodical market, at which buyers and sellers from a hundred towns would be present, and we wished to deliver our message in the hearing of people from as many different villages as possible, and sell them our Scriptures and tracts to carry back in their bundles and baskets to read each to the people in his own village, that the "seeds of the Kingdom" might be scattered far and wide. Going into the bazar as soon as we had rested a little, and had our midday meal, myself and two of my four native assistants had alternately preached to different audiences all the afternoon. As we entered a street we would mount an old cart, or a pile of building materials, anything that would raise us so that we could be seen and heard, and sing one of the beautiful Telugu tunes to Christian words, and gather an audience, and then read to them from one of the gospels, and preach to them of Jesus Christ and of the full salvation. He had wrought out for all the world. Then selling as many Scriptures, gospels and tracts as we could to them for a small price, we would go around into another street, gather another company, preach again and sell more books until night had fallen upon us. Meantime the two other native assistants were moving through the crowds of the market, selling books and tracts to all who would buy. We had disposed of many scores of books and tracts, and, at last, when the Fair was over, had returned to our camp too weary to sleep, but glad to have sent "the message" into a hundred different and scattered towns. During the intervening week we had been slowly traveling on, stopping to preach in all the villages we passed, and, as I rode along on my pony from village to village, often very weary, I had again and again thought of the scenes of that market day, and wondered if the books carried into the far-off villages without the voice of the living preacher to explain and enforce them, had been read, and if read, understood, and, if understood, believed; and I confess that my faith had not been as strong as I had wished. Now there was a chance to test the matter. So, without replying to their question as to whether I was the man, and whether I had any more books, I asked, "What were those books, and what did they tell about?"

"One of them was *Luka Suvarta*, the Gospel of Luke, and another was *Nistararatnakara*, the Jewel Mine of Salvation, and the other was *Gnanabodha*, Spiritual Teaching," they said.

The last, Spiritual Teaching, is a tract of the size of a gospel, in which the insufficiency of Hinduism to save a soul, and the all-sufficiency of Christianity are clearly set forth. The Jewel Mine of Salvation, or the Gospel in Song, gives the whole plan of salvation in Telugu poetry, set to their own choicest native tunes. Both these were prepared by the Rev. Dr. H. M. Scudder, and published in the Telugu language by the American Tract Society. "But what did these books tell about?" I asked.

"Those books," said they, "those wonderful books say that there is but one God. We thought there were three hundred and thirty millions of gods, but those books say that there is but *one*, and that he is a God of Love, and that when he saw that we were sunken in sin, ah, don't we know that we are, and that we could not save ourselves, nor get rid of our own sins—have we not tried it, and don't we know we cannot?—that then he determined to undertake the task for us, and that—those books say it—he actually sent his own son into this world as a divine redeemer, and that he, *Yesu Kristu*—Jesus Christ—really came here and was born of a woman, like one of us, and that when he had taught the way of holiness by his words and by his example, and had done many marvelous deeds, to prove that he was really divine, he actually gave up his own life and let himself be killed as a sacrifice for our sins, and that he was buried, and after three days he came to life—those books say so—and when hundreds of people had seen him alive, he actually went up again into Heaven, and that he is there now, alive, and that if we pray to him he will hear us, and that all that we have to do is to repent of our sins, and leave them off, and pray to him, and say, O *Yesu Kristu* do thou free me from my sin, and make me thy child, and when I die take me to be with thee, and that he will do all the rest—those books say so—and that when we die we shall go to Heaven and be with him forever. Sir, are you the man that had those books, and are they true, and have you any more of them?"

Who can conceive my joy as I sat there on my pony and heard those men tell what they had themselves already learned from "those wonderful books." I forgot the toils and dangers of the journey. I forgot then about the mob that had surrounded me in a walled town a fortnight before, and torn up the paving-stones to stone me with, because I had dared to come among them preaching another religion than theirs. For my thoughts reverted to the Fair at Santatópe and the men from a hundred villages that had taken these books home with them, and I thanked my God that I was a missionary, that he had led me to come forth on this long and difficult journey, that he had led his people to print these books, and sent his Spirit with them when circulated, and that he had rebuked my lack of faith, and showed me what the books and His enlightening Spirit could do, and I turned to my impatient questioners and said, "Yes, brothers, I am the man that had those books, and I have a whole cart-load of books like them. Don't you see the cart coming yonder? Please show me a shady place where we may pitch our tents, and you shall have as many books as you want, for we shall stay here until to-morrow morning."

Meantime a number of village watchmen had come up, seeing me talking with the head men of the village, as these proved to be, and now without stopping to answer my question about shade, they turned to these watchmen and said: "Here, you Gopal, run to the village of Kistnagar, and you, Mallappa, run to Cotta Kota, and you Sitadu, run to Gollapalle, and you here, and you there, and tell them all that the man with the wonderful books has come, and that he has a cart-load more for sale, and tell them to come in and bring their money, and they can get all they want and talk with him, too, about the books. Tell them to come quick, as he is going to be here only to-day, and they may never have another

chance." And before I had got to the grove to which they took me I saw the men running through the mountain passes to villages three, five and seven miles away, to tell them to come in and get the wonderful books, and hear the wonderful news of the Divine Redeemer who could take away all our sins.

Before we had taken our breakfast—for we had only taken a cup of coffee on starting at four o'clock in the morning—and were rested enough to begin to talk—for we had already preached in a number of different villages that morning—deputations from the different villages to which news had been sent, began to arrive, ready to hear the news and buy the books. They kept us talking from three o'clock in the afternoon until ten o'clock at night, for by the time we had told the Story of stories to one group another group from another village a little farther away would have come, and when we went to tell the Story over again to them the first group would not go away, for they said it was so good they wanted to hear it over again. The crowd around us kept increasing as we took turns in talking and resting, giving each time the Story, but adding each time new incidents in the life of the God man, and new phases of redeeming love, until, at ten o'clock, we told them that we must lie down and rest now, as we were to start on early in the morning, and they then reluctantly withdrew. And as we lay on our camp cots we saw, throughout the night, whenever we opened our eyes, strange lights flickering in the streets of the town near by, and at daylight, as we rose to go on our journey, they came out from the town with the different books in their hands, with the leaves turned down here and there—for they said they had been reading the books all night long—so as to see whether they understood them before we left, for they never expected to find any one else to explain the books after we had gone; and how eagerly they listened as I answered the questions they asked from the turned-down leaves, for they wanted to be sure they knew how to obtain this salvation.

I do not give this as a sample of what usually occurs on our preaching tours. God does not always lift the veil. He bids us walk by faith, not by sight. We more usually meet with opposition, or, still worse, with indifference. We often wail with Isaiah, "Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed." But, now and then, God sees fit to raise one corner of the veil and let us see what may occur in scores of scattered villages, of which we shall for the first time learn when we meet those redeemed ones in the land where all is known.

Meantime, this one incident in my own experience, twenty-three years ago, is my answer to those who ask, "What is the use of scattering books and tracts in heathen lands without the living missionary to explain them?" God has said, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." And He fulfills His promise.

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